

## Another View of Repentance

Ep 5 Yr B Mark 1:29-39 February 7, 2021

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A crowd presses in and surrounds Jesus looking for healing and hope. This morning's gospel lesson tells us that after Jesus leaves the synagogue and heals Peter's mother in law that the whole city gathers at the door. Everyone in need, in pain, everyone concerned about someone else wants to talk to Jesus, see him, hear him, experience the good news he proclaims. They press around him in their need. And Jesus brings the kingdom of heaven to them amidst that chaos.

This past year has been rough. Filled with ups and downs and uncertainty because of Covid 19. And I'm not sure about you but to me it seems like every time we get a bit of stability, we start to get used to the new normal, everything changes again. In the spring after a period of lock down things opened up, we got the Atlantic bubble, the fall looked promising, we were doing fine and then the second wave hit and things shifted again.

And while we're didn't go back to the way things were at the start of all of this many of the things we got used to doing stopped when winter arrived and restrictions tightened. And the vaccine rollout that started so promising has now hit a snag. And while we know the setbacks are temporary- the numbers for the second wave are going down in Nova Scotia, restrictions are loosening, and more vaccines are getting ready to roll out- the uncertainty seems to be relentless and everything is still so complicated.

But through the complications we have risen to the occasion. We have been caring for each other and making the best. We have been learning how to meet, how to stay in touch, how to continue through this pandemic. And God has been with us. Looking back over the last 12 months there is no doubt that God has been with us. Giving us hope, peace, the strength to get through the chaos and be the people Jesus needs us to be. We have changed our lives, taken a good hard look at our priorities, and we have carried on.

But none of that has been easy. The past year has taken a toll emotionally, physically, and spiritually on all of us. We have made do but we are painfully aware of how difficult our lives have become. We are hopeful that life will improve but we aren't sure how much more of the chaos we can handle.

In our gospel lesson there is a pause after the crowds leave for the night, after Jesus teaches and heals and meet them in their pain and sorrow and need. Now everyone knows that when another day starts the crowds and the need will return. And this is when Jesus does something interesting. He gets up early, goes by himself, and he prays.

In fact the disciples when they wake up have to go looking for him. Jesus takes time away from everything that is going on. Away from the need, the chaos, the pressure. Jesus takes time to be with God. Jesus turns himself from the demands on him, from what he can do and should do, and turns his attention toward God.

Which is actually the definition of repentance. And I know that sounds strange to our ears because Jesus hasn't done anything wrong. He has healed and cared for the people around him. But don't forget he has been surrounded by all the need, the pain, the hurt of those people. He has given so much of himself that he is more than likely weary, tired, and drained.

And while we think of repentance as turning away from evil the fact is that repentance is not just about turning from wrong but about turning toward God. And after bringing the kingdom of heaven near, after making sure people experience what God wants, God intends, what God offers to the world, Jesus turns himself to God in order to refocus, reorient, and renew himself.

Which when you think of it is Jesus actually living out the good news he preaches. Because remember two weeks ago we heard Jesus proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news. In our lesson, Jesus is showing the kingdom of heaven, and then he needs to turn to God so that he isn't overwhelmed by all the suffering and pain and demands that fill his day.

So if you are tired, if you are hurting, if you are finding yourself at wits end because of what is happening then turn to God. Take the time, take the opportunity each week, each day, or even more often to be quiet, to be calm, to be with God. Maybe that comes through reading the Bible, devotionals, listening to music or maybe through prayer, meditation, or some other way. Take the time to look toward God and away from everything else that is going on in your life. Take a rest, on a regular basis. Take a Sabbath.

Because that is what Jesus does as he goes off- he takes a Sabbath, time away from the demands and work of his life. And again while we usually think of Sabbath as a time when we can't do things what Sabbath actually means is a break from the routine, the work, the world. An opportunity to refresh, to renew, to let go of the burdens of life for awhile.

For Sabbath is a time with God where we let go of what occupies us and worries us and feel again God's love and grace. Sabbath is a time when set aside our pain, our fears, our burdens, and let God care for us. And just like sleep or food the fact is we need that break, that time with God, in order to be healthy and stay healthy.

Because let's make no mistake about it, scripture tells us that Jesus takes this type of break, a Sabbath to be with God, many times. Buried around the stories of great actions and wonders are quiet little stories of Jesus going off by himself, Jesus praying alone, of Jesus stepping back from the demands of the crowds and needy people and stepping toward God, and of the disciples having to search for him because he has gone to a quiet place to pray.

So take a Sabbath as part of your life. In your day make sure there is some time just for you and God. It can be as unstructured as a cup of tea and some quiet where your mind is free to just be. It can be as structured as a devotional plan where you read the Bible. And the truth is that sometimes finding that time, discovering that way to draw closer to God can be as enriching as the time itself. For when we take the focus off what we are doing and need to do and allow God to enter our lives, the God care for us, support us, and renew us in ways we never expected possible.

The disciples find Jesus and tell him that there are others looking for him and there is still a great need all around him. And Jesus replies by telling them that it is now time to go to other places and preach the good news of God. He leads the disciples to continue the work and indeed do more than they expect.

Because taking the time each day away from our work and responsibilities, taking the time each week away from what we need to do may feel like we are shirking our responsibilities. But the truth is that when we take the time to be with God, God shows us not merely how to continue on in our lives, but allow us to see and be a part of the better and greater things that God intends for our lives and the world.